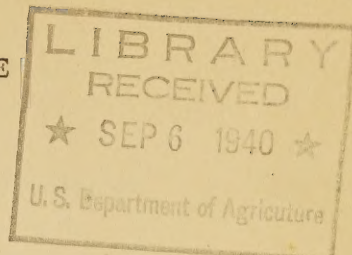


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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Bureau of Agricultural Economics



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A REVIEW OF SOME RECENT STUDIES OF SOUTHERN CULTURE

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Address, Southern Conference on Teaching and Research in Sociology  
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In this review of five monographs an attempt has been made to summarize findings and methods briefly and to offer some suggestions and appraisals. The authors have been quoted freely, but the brevity of the descriptions do not do justice to the monographs. Since these monographs fall in the fields of history, anthropology, psychology, and geography, and since I certainly cannot aspire to be an expert in all of these disciplines, even these brief treatments may be considered superficial. But if this paper indicates a new trend in research and if it inspires people to read these monographs and to pursue further the intriguing problems with which they grapple, it will have served a useful purpose.

As Shryock emphasizes in one of his monographs, 1/ the conditions of life in the South have been variously interpreted by southerners. During slave times racial or biological interpretations were prevalent. It might be noted that writers of this period may have, as Shryock indicates, indirectly influenced Bobineau, whose works certainly influenced the development of the racial theories of the Nazis in Germany.

More recently geographic and physiographic factors have come to the fore. Possibly we are now entering a period of cultural interpretations. Such interpretations have appeared at various periods in the history of the South. The monographs here reviewed are primarily cultural interpretations.

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1/ Shryock, Richard H., Cultural Factors in the History of the United States, Reprinted from The Journal of Southern History, Volume V, No. 3, August 1939.





1. Shryock's Studies of British and German Heritages  
in Southern Agriculture

These studies may harbinger a changed emphasis in the thinking of Americans concerning their esteem for English and German cultural heritages. Two monographs, British Versus German Traditions in Colonial Agriculture 2/ and Cultural Factors in the History of the South 3/ by Shryock, present historical evidence to indicate that the reason why the rural South is a problem area with eroded soils, low incomes, heterogeneity of races, poor agricultural practices, disease, and low living levels was that the original settlers were not, for the most part, agriculturists. They were Britishers who had lost their peasant techniques and attitudes during the upheavals accompanying the enclosure and other movements in England. Speaking of Virginia in particular, Shryock writes: "One may sum up by saying that, for many of the early settlers, the migration to Virginia must have been a sort of back-to-the-farm movement, with all the disadvantages that such a procedure is likely to involve. In addition, the first 'adventurers' had been deliberately misled in the expectation that riches could be easily and promptly acquired in this English Eldorado. They were, observe other historians, 'obsessed by a desire for gold' and by a 'boundless faith in get-rich-quick possibilities' in general.

"To make matters worse, the migration was for more than a decade directed by merchants who themselves probably knew little of the soil. While the Virginia Company did at first attempt to check the trend towards tobacco, it soon accommodated itself to the situation; for tobacco alone promised immediate profits and the company was after all a money-making concern. Like the settlers, it was naturally more concerned with profits than with agriculture per se, more devoted to the interests of investors than to those of posterity.

"If these observations are correct, here in Virginia were certainly a people lacking in agricultural tradition and quite naturally seeking the quickest way out of their difficulties. This is nothing against the settlers themselves. But reasoning a priori again, one would not expect a people so motivated to 'dig in' by intensive and varied cultivation--that way was long and hard. It required, moreover, certain knowledge and skills. One would not expect a people so handicapped to survive, unless they could find a money crop and that right soon. Tobacco alone assured immediate profits--or, at least, promised the most profit--and so tobacco must be grown regardless of the consequences. They could hardly

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2/ Shryock, Richard H., British Versus German Traditions in Colonial Agriculture, Reprinted from Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Volume XXVI, No. 1, June 1939.

3/ Op. cit.





foresee, in full, the destruction of soils, the mounting debts, the rural isolation, and the racial difficulties which were to follow.

"As a matter of fact these consequences were temporarily inhibited, during the seventeenth century, when the first attempts to set up large plantations failed for lack of labor. But the plan was revived as soon as the lack was remedied by negro slavery. After about 1700, it will be recalled, a small group of 'first families' did acquire wealth and there was a forced flowering of their class and their culture. When, before the end of that century, far-sighted individuals regretted the price which Virginia was paying for those things, it seemed almost too late to call a halt. Economic patterns were set by this time, and were fast hardening in a vicious circle. Certain able and courageous planters might experiment and even emancipate, but the rank and file of farmers would not or could not follow.

"And then came the second grand southern staple, upland cotton! This was apparently no more a geographical necessity than was tobacco. There is some evidence that cotton, like the so-called Virginia tobacco, was an exotic, and that the lower South was not particularly well adapted to its cultivation. Certain cultural factors not well known led to its introduction, and then the Virginia patterns--or similar ones from Carolina--moved in to exploit the new agricultural Eldorado. The tragic cycle was now repeated but no longer in colonial isolation; hence those national tensions which have sometimes been traced back to temperature and rainfall." 4/

Shryock puts his discussion into broad scope by claiming that English colonists have seldom been good agriculturists, and, because of English control of world seaways and colonies, they were able to discourage settlement of many large areas by people who were good agriculturists.

"This perspective on Southern developments has implications for world history as well as for our own. As far as it goes, it presents the British settlers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as people poorly adapted for the colonization of agricultural regions. The general success of their empire has perhaps blinded us to this fact--a success apparently due to maritime and manufacturing skills. The English, like any other people, naturally did best in regions to which their particular gifts were well adapted. In New England, for example, their seafaring ability saved the day. This very maritime success, however, finally gave them control of the world's seaways and colonies, and may have indirectly discouraged Continental peoples from settling great open areas like Canada, Australia, and our own South. It seems

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4/ British Vs. German Traditions in Colonial Agriculture, Op. Cit. pp. 43-45.





probable that Continental peasants were better adapted to such regions than were the English unemployed. But German and Italian governments had no colonies to which to send their farmers, while the Dutch and French lost their holdings after English victories. All this suggests that the pride which both Englishmen and Americans have taken in Anglo-Saxon colonization, as well as the disdain they have sometimes felt for Spanish and German attempts in the same direction, is due for a thorough overhauling." 5/

The Germans, according to Shryock, had not lost their peasant backgrounds. They were not possessed with the urge to become traders or to take up get-rich-quick schemes.

"Having lived on small holdings in Germany, they had learned to preserve the best soils, to tend and improve live stock, and to vary and cultivate their crops. Perhaps most important of all, they were accustomed to and expected the hardest kind of labor. Coming to America to escape both religious and political persecution, they were seeking a way of life rather than quick returns. Although their ideals were at times as materialistic as anything the Virginians desired, it was a different sort of materialism that was involved. While the latter set their eyes on profits, with the comforts and social position these would bring, the Germans dreamed rather of bigger and better barns. In a word, while the Virginians exhibited in America the ambitious economy of capitalism and exploitation, the Germans maintained an older, semi-feudal economy of conservation. What these differing systems held in store for America became apparent with the passing of the years.

"The whole German pattern of settlement was different from the start. While English pioneers seem to have headed for the loose dirt, which meant bottoms and somewhat sandy uplands, the Germans waded into 'the more permanently fertile, heavy-textured wooded lands among which the clay loams of limestone origin are conspicuous.' This was not due to any peculiar genius on their part, but simply to the fact that the virtues of such soils had long been known to them at home. The Scotch-Irish, who often settled in close proximity to the Germans, likewise sought out the soils with which they were familiar; but unfortunately for them, these were the inferior ones often found in hilly terrain. This tendency of the one group to select superior soils was itself a cultural factor of considerable significance. It is hard to picture eighteenth-century German peasants ever settling on some of the southern lands occupied by the British, and from which the federal government is only today trying to remove the present occupants.

"But to proceed with the story. While the English settlers were girdling the trees or at best leaving the stumps in the fields,

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5/ Cultural Factors in the History of the South, Op. Cit. p. 344.





the Germans pulled everything out by the roots. While the English scratched their loose soils lightly, only to watch them erode with every heavy rain, the Germans ploughed their heavy lands deeply and held them intact. While the tidewater Virginians let their live stock roam at will and actually claimed that to house cattle would ruin them, the Germans built their barns even before their houses were up--occasionally combining the two in the old Teutonic manner.

"Instead of cultivating tobacco to the exclusion or serious limitation of other crops, the Germans rotated a varied series. To some extent, this was also true of their Scotch-Irish neighbors; but the latter were rarely so successful with the same practices. The Germans were eventually glad to sell their surplus wheat, but seldom concentrated on it as the tidewater planters did on tobacco."6/

Shryock comments as follows on an ante bellum observation. The English "were still engaged in 'getting rich quick' at the expense of posterity; while the German-Americans continued to get rich slowly to the benefit of those who came after them."7/

Because they were adept artisans the skill of the Germans did not stop with agriculture. "They shared with the Scotch-Irish a bent for handicraft manufactures, as is seen in their early development of the paper industry. It was probably no accident that they developed the 'covered wagon' and the so-called 'Kentucky rifle,' both of which later became symbolical of the whole frontier."8/ These handicrafts stood them in good stead in erecting some of the finest farm buildings in the country.

To the English, Shryock would charge that most imponderable of all problems, the race problem. "Finally, as one would anticipate from other qualities, the Germans displayed an inveterate desire to do their own work and a corresponding disinclination to use negro slaves. It is hardly necessary to labor the point that this was a distinct advantage. In Pennsylvania they employed indentured white servants, but never followed Virginia in the transfer to negro laborers. Some slaves were later used by Germans in Maryland and in North Carolina, but not to the same degree as by their neighbors. This can be substantiated not only by tradition but by approximate figures, as a recent study of central North Carolina reveals. In Rowan County, for instance, the number of slaves 'increased from about 100 in 1754, to 1741 in 1790, but there was no corresponding increase on the farms of the Germans.' In the whole Salisbury district, where two-thirds of the Piedmont Germans lived and throughout which the type of farming was generally the same in 1790, 20 percent of all families owned slaves, but only 12 percent of the Germans. This was about two generations

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6/ British Vs. Germans in Colonial Agriculture, Op. cit., pp. 46-48.

7/ Cultural Factors in the History of the South, Op. cit., p. 343.

8/ British Vs. Germans in Colonial Agriculture, Op. cit., pp. 48 and 49.





after the latter first settled in the region.

"Here one approaches the conditions of a controlled experiment, since the environmental factors were much the same for both racial groups. Similar contrasts can be found in the early opposition to slavery of the Salzburgers in Georgia, and of the Germans of Neu Braunfels in the Texas cotton belt during ante bellum days. The fact that German farmers later came to employ some slaves probably means only that their opposition to slavery was lost, along with language and other culture patterns, in the gradual process of 'Americanization.'" <sup>9/</sup> Shryock then launches into a discussion of the German contribution to the anti-slavery movement in America.

"The result of all the cultural differences noted between German and English-speaking farmers, was apparent before the end of the eighteenth century. While the tidewater group in Virginia wasted their farms and faced agricultural decadence, the Germans improved theirs and prospered. Within regions settled jointly by English-speaking and German groups, the latter almost universally held the reputation of developing the best farms. In parts of Pennsylvania they found lands already despoiled by British 'cultivation,' and promptly restored them by their own methods. In Maryland the capitalists feared the spread of the one-crop system to their lands in the western part of the state, but were unable to persuade Anglo-American settlers to avoid it. The landholders thereupon encouraged German-Americans to come in, and the latter established 'a distinctly different form of agriculture.' By the end of the colonial period, the Germans had developed what might be called folk-farming to almost its highest possible level. Contemporary and later accounts afford such overwhelming evidence of this that it is scarcely necessary to discuss it in further detail."<sup>10/</sup>

Shryock does not stop with his claim that the Germans were the best farmers in America. "It may or may not have been a coincidence that even the English-speaking counties which showed the greatest agricultural improvement in Virginia after 1800, were usually those adjacent to counties of large German population. At the present time, there are still certain definite areas in the South--such as Cullman County, Alabama--in which superior farming is ascribed to the presence of German elements. Whether such phenomena have any significance for the present thesis, is a question worthy of further investigation.

"Incidentally, it is not usually recalled that these Germans were not only the best husbandmen in America but in other parts of the western world as well. At about the same time that many Palatines fled to America, others escaped to Russia and to what is now Roumania. Recent observers report that the superiority of

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<sup>9/</sup> British Vs. Germans in Colonial Agriculture, Op. cit., pp. 49 and 50.

<sup>10/</sup> British Vs. Germans in Colonial Agriculture, Op. cit., p. 51.





their agricultural villages is as apparent today in the Russian setting, after a lapse of two centuries, as it is halfway round the world in Pennsylvania. In addition to these migrations, the Palatines settled in both North and South Ireland; and they had already demonstrated their superiority to Scotch-Irish farmers in Ulster itself, before both groups moved together to America. The whole pattern hangs together." 11/

Comments and Criticisms:

(1) Studies are needed to test the claim that the ethnic groups who neighbored the Germans were better farmers because of the techniques borrowed from the Germans. Kollmorgen writes about the Germans and "Georgia crackers" in Cullman County as follows: "There are many traditional cotton farmers who have lived near German farmers for over half a century and still have failed to duplicate any of their farming practices." (See footnote 16 on page 13.)

(2) We must distinguish between peasant groups of all kinds which settled in closed communities and those which were scattered. We should find, if possible, Quaker and other Anglo groups which are "cultural islands" and compare these islands with other non-in-groups on similar soils. The influence of the integration of religion was certainly manifest in Quaker, Mormon, and other groups with English traditions. In the Middle West and in other places where Germans settled upon isolated holdings they are frequently not superior farmers when compared with their non-German neighbors, be these Swedes, Danes, Finns, or Americans. Cultural islands and closed culture groups can preserve their cultural heritages and enforce their values better than can heterogeneous populations or populations which do not have in-group characteristics.

(3) Shryock overemphasizes the importance German agricultural methods have in the success of the Germans from Pennsylvania and underestimates the importance of their tendency toward cooperation and mutual aid--traits that were highly developed because the various Germanic groups were frequently religious sects and groups, the members of which engaged in mutual assistance in loaning implements and money, and in offering other assistance. Also many of these isolated groups keep what is good in their own culture and borrow much that they find desirable from the surrounding culture. As Killmorgen indicates in one of the bulletins reviewed below, the Germans in Franklin County profited from the inventions and practices of farmers in Northern United States. The Southerners, being more isolated from the North, were slower to adopt these northern methods. Thus, the Germans could adopt the best practices of English and German-speaking lands and, what is important, adoption among them, once one member had proved the worth of a practice, was very rapid. The integrations which cultural islands enjoy make possible quick adoption once a trait has been taken up by a part of





the group. An Anglo group similarly integrated would behave likewise. On the other hand, when the cultural islands are very conservative and slow to adopt new practices, it is their persistence and industry which makes them good farmers. Many examples indicate that the self-denial and hard work of these people would not be possible if their group norms and values were to disappear. This would hold for in-groups of English as well as German farmers.

(4) Shryock's claim that Germans were generally less prone to buy slaves is not without support. The geographical factor, however, also played its role. Kollmorgen points out in his report on Cullman County, Georgia, that the belief that the Germans alone kept the negroes out of the county is unfounded. The small Anglo farmers in hill and mountain areas in the South and elsewhere had little use for the Negro. The areas in the South which were suitable for the development of the plantation economy usually were most frequently settled by planters who employed slaves. There are, however, cultural islands of Germans and other peasant groups, such as the French, where this does not hold. To this extent Shryock is right. Peasants who are accustomed to hard work and who use a minimum of nonfamily labor and practice live-at-home agriculture were less likely to buy slaves. The geographical factor should not be omitted, however.

(5) Shryock's conclusions are based principally upon studies of Virginia and Maryland. Nothing short of painstaking historical and cultural anthropological investigations of the ethnic and racial cultural heritage of the whole South will prove the truth or falsity of his generalizations, but few will doubt the importance of this field of research.

(6) Some who admit that Germans have been better farmers than the ordinary English groups in America claim that all these differences can be explained in terms of the harder work done by German women and children, and the meager formal education allowed the children. Such claims should be further investigated.

(7) Some historians have maintained, with Craven, that "in all cases. . . . frontiersmen were a bit more extravagant regardless of nationality, at least later generations were, if not the original immigrants."<sup>12/</sup> Future investigations should determine whether or not Germans generally resisted those frontier tendencies. Then, the assumption that the Germans always chose the limestone soils should be tested. We do know that a few German cultural islands in the South are located upon nonlimestone soils.

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<sup>12/</sup> Personal correspondence with Professor Avery Craven, University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.





## II. Kollmorgen's Studies of Cultural Islands

Farm enterprises, practices, and living levels of the German-Swiss in Franklin County, Tennessee 13/ stand in sharp contrast to those of "native" Anglo-Saxon farmer "control groups" located in the same county. The bulletin describing these opens with a series of quotations such as "Many common vegetables are rarities in many southern farming communities, although both soil and climate are extremely favorable to their growth." "With more than half the country's farmers, the South has less than a fifth of the farm implements." "The paradox of the South is that while it is blessed by Nature with immense wealth, its people as a whole are the poorest in the country." "Nearly a fifth of all southern farm homes have no toilets at all." These quotations are from The Report on Economic Conditions of the South 14/ and give Franklin County broad significance by proving that in at least one county the plight of the nonGerman southern farmers who live on poor diets and eroded soil is in large measure to be accounted for by the fact that they have different cultural heritages than do their German-Swiss neighbors, who are comparatively the most industrious and successful farmers. "The farming methods introduced. . . . (by those German-Swiss) clearly represented a pattern of farming that was learned abroad and in various northern states. The significant consideration here is that, in the same physical environment, different cultural groups have developed what may be called different cultural landscapes." "In general, the European peasant type of farmer has apparently been more successful in the South than the Yankee farmer of the North who moved South for he generally avoided large financial obligations and had enough patience to adapt himself to a new agricultural environment."

Speaking of the German-Swiss practices abroad, "erosion was constantly guarded against, by terraces--mostly hand made--by planting grasses and legumes, by various methods of cultivation, and, in some instances, by carrying washed-down soil back to its former place. Stock grazed some in summer on slope lands, but spent most of the year in stalls. Every particle of manure was utilized as fertilizer. Rotation was an established practice. Food and feed plants were used to the last blade in a cycle which had as its objective the maintenance of fertility at a maximum. The use of lime was common and had been known since the time of the Romans. Alfalfa, one of the best hay crops known, was grown on nearly every Swiss farm."

The history of the settlement of the German-Swiss began in 1868 when a German-Swiss father and son named Kaserman first entered the county to buy land covered with thickets and "gullies deep

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13/ Kollmorgen, Walter M., The German-Swiss in Franklin County, Tennessee, U.S. Dept. Agr., May 1940 (Processed).

14/ Report on Economic Conditions of the South, Prepared for The President by the National Emergency Council, Washington, D.C., 1938.



enough to hide a man on horseback", the best of which produced corn yields of less than 10 bushels to the acre. He found people living in shacks, on poor diets, using crude hand tools, including "the frontier bull tongue (which) had been scratching the soil. At its best, this affair penetrated the soil only a few inches." "Harrowing was usually accomplished by pulling a fallen tree over the ground. Corn was planted and hoed by hand, but corn fields often became weed patches. Rotation of crops was unknown and many of the older citizens recall that corn was generally planted between standing stalks of the previous crop. Few if any cattle were fattened in feed lots, and hogs were fattened for only a short time before slaughter. Stock roamed at large, summer and winter, and so only a little manure accumulated from work stock. This manure was ignored as long as possible; when it became a nuisance, a new shack was erected. Some of the natives built sheds adjacent to and, in part, over streams. The walls of the structure did not quite reach the ground and so permitted a current of water to pass underneath. Work stock in the barn could thus water itself, and when the stream rose after heavy rains the nuisance in the form of manure was washed away."

The account describes the history of the original settlement as well as that of the German-Swiss whom Kaserman induced to settle there. The reclamation of the land by the immigrants and the development of a successful settlement through hard work and the utilization of crafts and skills learned abroad and in the north, the introduction of their old practices and new ones which they learned from literature in both English and German, and cooperative ventures and mutual aid are described. Over half of the report is devoted to an analysis of 1930 census records containing data relative to farm and living practices of the German-Swiss and three other control groups. The author concludes: "The German-Swiss have demonstrated that a highly diversified form of agriculture is possible and relatively profitable on the red limestone soils of the near-South. This demonstration does not necessarily prove that a similar program of farming is possible and profitable in all parts of the South. Soil potentialities are exceedingly varied in this part of the country, and the red limestone soils are among the better soils of the South. For instance, the farmers in Franklin County can raise alfalfa and bluegrass, if they use reasonably good farming practices. In general, the soils of the Coastal Plain and the Piedmont are not suitable for these crops, but other legumes and grasses can and should be grown more generally. The significant consideration is the fact that the South is by no means an undifferentiated region with uniform potentialities. What uniformity exists is largely cultural in nature and not physical."

#### Comments and Criticisms

Possibly Shryock's and Kollmorgen's rather extreme enthusiasm for German culture may be excused on the basis of the tendency of Americans generally to overemphasize the merits of their English traditions and to overlook the cultural and racial heritage of the





millions of German immigrants and their offspring living in this country. I hope, however, that Kollmorgen's future studies of the cultural islands and "control groups" will further test some inferences made in the Franklin County study. For example, he infers that southern farmers of Anglo-Saxon heritage, who thought that "farm subjects . . . . were not appropriate reading for a gentleman", do not read so much agricultural literature as his German-Swiss group. This inference needs testing on various tenure groups in the South.

One of the outstanding differences between the German-Swiss and the control groups is the dislike of the former for and the dependence of the latter on the cotton crop. Concerning the attitudes of the German-Swiss toward cotton, Kollmorgen writes, "questioning of the German-Swiss about their cotton-raising activities brought indifferent or amused replies. One man said he was 65 years old before he tried to raise a small patch of cotton, just as an experiment. Another elderly farmer replied, 'No, I never fooled with the stuff.' He quotes the Anglo groups as giving the following reasons for growing cotton.

"We need a cash crop we can count on."

"Cotton is raised on poor land, land that won't raise much of anything else."

"We can get a seed and fertilizer loan on a cotton crop."

"Cotton is raised by tenants on poor land and not by owners with good land."

"The landlord wants us to raise cotton."

"We haven't the tools and the stock to farm like the German-Swiss."

"The growing cotton provides work for the children during summer."

Kollmorgen would be the first to say that these differences need further investigation. The Pennsylvania Germans engage in highly commercialized tobacco and other cash-crop farming. They are among the first to introduce new crops and practices when they pay and do not interfere with certain taboos peculiar to their religion. The Germans in Cullman County, Georgia, who form the basis of the study by Kollmorgen, next to be reviewed, have worked the growing of cotton into their farming practices on the nonlimestone soil of the area. Why the Franklin County German farmers had not taken up the growing of cotton when cotton prices were good needs further explanation. Certainly it could be fitted into their economy in some way, even though the type of soil available made it possible to substitute grasses and livestock farming, practices which were more in harmony with their traditions.

Much has been said about the fact that the farmers of German background did not use Negro slaves to the extent that the Scotch-Irish and English did. As stated previously, Shryock discusses this problem (British Vs. German Traditions, p. 50), indicating the German's strong opposition to slavery. Kollmorgen states that in Franklin County, Tennessee, at first the German-Swiss did not even





hire the Negroes. But now they hire them, feed them at separate tables in their houses, teach them to use the most complicated machinery, and "to move more rapidly than they had been accustomed to doing." Since there is reason to believe that the attitude of the Southerner toward work accounts for some of the shiftless farming, the reviewer believes that this alleged speeding up of the Negro by the German-Swiss should be further investigated. The influence of the German-Swiss method in making Negroes work is quoted as follows: "We merely took them into the field or barn with us and told them to keep up with us, if they could." This should be examined. Whether or not the dominant group directly or indirectly sets the pace may be of practical as well as theoretical significance.

Kollmorgen, unlike Shryock, emphasizes the significance of cooperation among the German-Swiss; however, he does not lay great stress on the in-group phenomenon of mutual aid among the German-Swiss in Franklin County. Many of the members of religious groups and cultural islands assist each other, as do the Jewish and other groups which have in-group characteristics. Such exclusive in-group mutual aid in agriculture does not stimulate the development of ill will on the part of outsiders to the extent that it does in business or in the professions. But it does give the group which enjoys it real advantage over other groups of a more individualized nature.

Since Kollmorgen puts so much emphasis on the statistical comparison, his controls could be better chosen by using the method of matching schedules taken from the two groups being compared. <sup>15/</sup> The 39 schedules of the island group should be matched with control schedules with (1) the same soil base (this was accomplished in an approximate manner by the use of soil maps), (2) same acreage, (3) possibly the same number of years on the farm, and (4) in some instances, same tenure status. After this matching process the investigator could interview the families that remained. The matter of comparability of soils and other pertinent data could be further investigated. For this further step in the investigation the 518 schedules in the control group would be reduced to 39.

This suggestion does not mean that the statistical investigation does not accomplish what the author attempted to do. He has compared two cultural groups living on essentially the same type of soil. However, the acreage differences for his groups are great, being for the German-Swiss community and the three control groups 168, 114, 89, and 84 for total acreages and 82, 50, 34, and 41 for acreages of cropland harvested in 1929. There are also other important differences. The percentage of full and part owners were 95

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<sup>15/</sup> For an example of the application of this method, see: Chapin, F. Stuart and Jahn, Julius A., The Advantages of Work Relief Over Direct Relief in Maintaining Morale in St. Paul, in 1939, American Journal of Sociology, Vol. XLVI, No. 1, July 1940.



for the German-Swiss, and 80, 61, and 66 for the three control groups, indicating great differences in the German and nonGerman groups. One hundred percent of the German-Swiss croppers and 60 percent of the other German-Swiss tenants were related to their landlords, as compared with 73, 19, and 22 for croppers in the three control groups, and 22, 34, 26 for other tenants. The importance of some of these differences should be further investigated.

Kollmorgen's description of The German Settlement in Cullman County, Alabama 16/ is one of the most interesting studies in cultural adaptation and ethnic contrasts. There the homes of the Germans resemble those in the middle west. The traveler there will observe that these homes "are built on substantial foundations and he may surmise that they are built over large, well-kept cellars. Other developments that will strike him are rather large, well-kept barns, potato houses, well-kept lawns, shrubs, orchards, meadows, large strawberry patches, large sweet potato fields, and the almost-to-be-expected cotton fields and corn fields". The Germans are responsible for the high rank the county has attained in the production of strawberries and sweetpotatoes. They have diversified their crops and have a much higher standard of living than that which prevails among their cotton-farmer neighbors.

But the Germans of Cullman County almost met their match at the time of settlement and during the last quarter of the 19th century. They found there a nonlimestone soil, a soil on which the grasses so essential to the raising of livestock could be grown only with greatest care. Much to their surprise these soils required more than barnyard manure which had been the standby of the peasant through the ages. Here lime was needed, but German tradition had it that "lime made the parents rich and the children poor." The struggle of the Germans was described as "'a story of poverty, privation, and innumerable hardships,' and the 'grim spectre of starvation' was 'hovering over their struggling little colony.'"

'The soil was so poor that we shouldn't have stayed, but we were too poor to leave.' The fact is that a considerable number of them did leave, particularly if they had means, or friends and opportunities elsewhere. In this respect immigrants from the North had an advantage over those who had come from abroad and this may account for the fact that most of the remaining pioneer settlers have a foreign background instead of a northern background. This migration out of the county has continued up to the present."

"One of the early German immigrants recalled that his family lived on potatoes for six months. Others recalled that for months the daily fare consisted of potatoes, corn meal, and perhaps some game. Corn meal they considered a form of stock feed. Hardships were general and serious. Land needed to be cleared and log cabins built. Crops needed to be planted. With his vegetables and his

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16/ Kollmorgen, Walter M., The German Settlement in Cullman County, Alabama. U.S. Dept. Agr., 1940. (Still in manuscript form.)





fruit the German did fairly well, but these gave him little or no cash income. He knew nothing of raising cotton, while wheat, grasses, hay, and root crops were poorly adapted to his newly acquired land."

How the Germans saved themselves by introducing strawberries and potatoes, for the growing of which their background of thoroughness and industry made them particularly efficient, and by imitating the Georgia crackers (whose farming practices they at first abhorred) in the growing of cotton and corn and the use of commercial fertilizer, makes one of the interesting dramas of American agriculture.

"When the German first saw the cotton farmer in his new home he could not understand him. In fact, he did not consider him a farmer at all. He wasted manure and purchased commercial fertilizer. He lived largely on corn meal, white meat, and molasses, none of which the German relished. He lived in a shack and seemed to be satisfied. Moreover, he raised cotton and corn and little else. He did not rotate crops. To the German all these things went together and he wanted as little of it as possible. He definitely felt that the adoption of any one of these practices meant a lower, more undesirable form of life." Although the Germans do raise cotton they do not like it and admit the nonGermans' superiority in picking it. Kollmorgen quotes an informant: "'They are born with quick and nimble hands to pick cotton. Our hands are too big and too slow.'" But the German learned, and although he followed different practices than did the nonGerman he "stressed cotton, corn, strawberries, and sweetpotatoes in his farming." Grapes and fruit trees are common but have not assumed commercial importance. The cotton farmers, on the other hand, stressed cotton and corn and for many years failed to give any attention to the growing of strawberries and sweetpotatoes.

The nonGermans in Cullman County stand even today in sharp contrast to the Germans. They brought terraced farming, cotton, and commercial fertilizer but were not persistent and thorough enough to become good strawberry growers. The history of their settlement is recounted as follows: "As in northern Georgia, therefore, the early settlers introduced a good deal of low-grade stock which foraged the open, unfenced land. This stock received very little attention and represented a type of predatory agriculture in that no attempt was made to replenish fertility or vegetation which was consumed. Many of the natives burned the range every year so that new succulent plants would shortly reappear for grazing. This practice of burning the range was strongly condemned by the Germans because they held that burning destroyed the humus in the soil and also injured trees."

"Although the agricultural development of Cullman County was delayed, change and progress was very rapid after settlement began. The grazing period was short lived because of the tremendous influx of new settlers." "No agricultural problems perplexed him after he had established himself in his new home. His way of life was relatively simple and was largely on a subsistence level. A mule, a few acres of cotton and corn, commercial fertilizer, credit, a small





shack-like house with a fireplace he took for granted, and these were as accessible to him in Cullman County as in northern Georgia."

"The change from a largely grazing economy to a cotton-corn economy represents a typical cycle of development in the Cotton Belt. As land use became more and more intensive the cotton and corn crops became increasingly important."

The chief distinguishing characteristic of the German farms in Cullman is the presence of improvements. Their well-painted houses with foundations and cellars to store home-grown food, their ranges and stoves, their yards with trees, shrubs, grass, and flowers, their balanced economy and high levels of living and insignificant dependency rates, attest to the fact that they have conquered the soil.

"The Georgia cracker in general was not accustomed to large, substantial or well-built houses. The houses he had always lived in and liked were small, consisting of a few rooms. They were built with logs or unfinished lumber and rested on pillar foundations. In the yard he liked flowers, but he definitely disliked all forms of grasses. Bermuda grass he considered a weed which easily became a pest in the cotton patch. An attractive yard to him was kept clean and so he developed the custom of sweeping his yard with a broom. The bare ground soon became packed and so could easily be swept and kept free of loose dirt, twigs, weeds, or other objects. These practices and ideals the Georgia cracker brought with him to Cullman County and to this day one or several of these practices very frequently distinguish him."

As this study is still in manuscript form and subject to change, I shall not attempt to appraise or criticize it, except to say that the description of the struggle to wrest a living by methods and from soils with which these Germans were not acquainted is an interesting story in and of itself. The fact that, though handicapped at first, they surpassed the nonGermans in all criteria relative to successful farming attests the importance of culture. However, part of the story is tragic. When the German came "he loved good music, beer, wine, Old World dances, and all the Gemutlichkeit and Gesellschaft these luxuries implied. Sangervereiner were promptly formed when these people arrived and Old World dances were also frequent." Now these are gone. "Things are not what they used to be," and they never were in Cullman County. For them, the 'New Eldorado' had its shortcomings indeed."

### III. Shea's Study of the Cultural and Psychological "Roots of Man-Caused Forest Fires"

A "New Design for Forest Fire Prevention in the South" 17/,

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17/ Shea, John P., "New Design for Forest Fire Prevention in the South." Paper read before 65th Annual Meeting of the American Forestry Association, February 1-3, 1940, Biloxi, Mississippi. U. S. Forest Service. (Mimeographed).



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where 90 percent of all forest fires are caused by man, has been developed from a study of 200 families located in a typical southern forest. The original study, "Getting at the Roots of Man-Caused Forest Fires," <sup>18/</sup> with its recommendations, although made by a psychologist, deals primarily with group phenomena and is a sociological and cultural anthropological investigation. The basic method used in the study was "The controlled interview" which "may be compared roughly to playing a game fish with a reel of not-too-strong fishing line."

In this report we are not dealing with Germans. According to the author, the denizens of the southern forests come from an Anglo-Saxon stock with the southern disbelief in the merits of hard work. They are proud and sensitive even though they stand at the bottom of the southern class or caste system. "Like their ancestors they 'takes no sass off'n nobody'. They 'insults easy' and they 'shoots quick'". According to the author, "many of these frustrated people allow themselves to become careless and dirty in their persons. Most men go unshaved, women look bedraggled, and many of their houses are disordered and unsanitary. Farm implements and tools are allowed to rust by farmers who 'see no way out'. Such persons, though literate, neglect to read. Most of them neglect to play musical instruments and to cultivate handicrafts."

The study reveals that burning woods is traditional with the southern forest people who battle with forests to keep their small plots of land free. Since game reserves are depleted, making hunting and fishing, which were traditional sources of diversion and food supply, futile pursuits. Forest fires furnish an important source of recreation. The people think burning the woods kills off boll weevil, helps produce better cotton crops, kills off snakes, destroys ticks, kills bean beetles, keeps their fields from being choked up with brush, makes grass grow better and quicker, keeps them healthy by killing "fever germs", and is the best way to keep the woods "clean." "Woods burning is 'right'. We have always done it. Our fathers and grandfathers burned the woods. It was 'right' for them and it is the 'right' thing for us to do."

After psychological fashion the author analyzes the following basic urges and drives: (1) Need for income (economic), (2) need for social belongingness (including recreations), (3) need for prestige, (4) need or craving for religion, (5) craving for excitement (this cuts through all the other urges), and (6) need for security. As the first four "needs" are not met conflict develops, resulting in "frustration", which in turn leads to setting of forest fires and "human cussedness."

To deter these people from setting fires the author writes, "We cannot win their cooperation by locking horns with them in their

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<sup>18/</sup> Shea, John P., "Getting at the Roots of Man-Caused Forest Fires", U. S. Dept. Agr., 1940.





beliefs. And mere propaganda and prohibitions against such deep-seated beliefs are about as effective as a popgun against an elephant."

It is recommended that the fire-setting habit be "blocked off" and punishment for fire setting made quick and sure. A community program with movies, fishing, and hunting, sponsored by a community center with a Forest Officer who can "whittle" and "spit" with the people, particularly the "Pappies" who control all, in this culture, is designed to develop new habits to supplant the old fire-setting activities.

#### Comments and Criticisms

The report of study is written primarily for forest rangers and persons not acquainted with sociological research. If the author dramatizes his theme he may be forgiven. Those who have been urging the United States Forest Service to see the people in the forests as well as the trees will hail this and several other recent publications of the Forest Service as signs which presage a more human program for the future of this great institution.

If I were to offer a criticism of Shea's trail-blazing work, it would be his theory of frustration. He postulates six basic urges or drives and indicates that only two of these, the "need or craving for religion" and "need for security", are not "at or near the level of frustration." Much is made of the failure of the "need for income" to be met. Many peasant peoples are very poor but are less frustrated by impositions and low incomes than laborers and professionals in higher brackets. Crime and insanity rates are frequently lowest among people who are poor in material goods. It is doubtful whether poverty per se causes the frustrations here described as "human cussedness".

One might argue rather that it is the process of learning to be dissatisfied with what one has, or sudden changes rather than amount of income which leads to frustration, if this term must be used. This same principle also holds for the postulated "craving for excitement." Certainly some groups, the Puritans, for example, mastered this so-called craving. One can doubt that the "need for prestige" would necessarily lead to forest fire setting. Many groups are despised by outsiders but have their own scales of prestige within the group. Unless in-group prestige is gained by the act of setting forest fires, it is to be doubted that this alleged deficiency is an important cause. From my knowledge and from Shea's own description of these people I cannot see why he feels that their "need for social belongingness (understood to indicate the various needs belonging to a man as a social animal,--the individual and his group)" is so poorly met as to lead to frustration. According to the author's description of the family system and general social interaction of these people, they have a definite "feeling of belonging." Following is the author's own description of the setting of forest fires:





"Frustrated people have fancied as well as real grievances. They set fires to burn out an enemy; to damage a 'hostile' environment. Also to get back at 'Outsiders', particularly 'Outside' officials and CCC boys whom we have placed there and trained as fire fighters. The \$30 a month, \$360 a year, paid to CCC enrollees seems 'big money' to forest residents whose total family income is \$200 a year or less. Accordingly, they get a kick out of seeing the '\*\*\* \*\*\*\*' enrollees, particularly Negroes, 'sweat to earn that pay.'"

Here it is outsiders as compared with the forest people, and the latter do not seem to be suffering from a lack of belonging.

These criticisms should not be thought of as disparaging the general analysis. The recommended program, which is calculated to fit the cultural pattern of the people rather than to crash into it with broadsides of control measures which only antagonize, is to be praised.

#### GENERAL SUMMARY STATEMENTS

All of the writings reviewed emphasize the cultural aspects of the agricultural problems of the South. Those of Shryock and Kollmorgen compare ethnic groups--Germans and nonGermans. Shea describes nonGermans in the forests without comparing them with Germans. That German silviculture and agriculture is very different from that practiced by nonGerman groups in this country cannot be doubted. Why these differences exist has not been adequately explained. The extent to which these differences are perpetuated in America needs further study.



